

Addressing Misinformation, One Conversation at a Time

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Assisted Living Forum

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Outline for this talk

- Review COVID-19 topics susceptible to misinformation
- Some definitions
- Explore why it may be easy to come across and believe COVID-19 misinformation
- Anatomy of a conversation to address misinformation

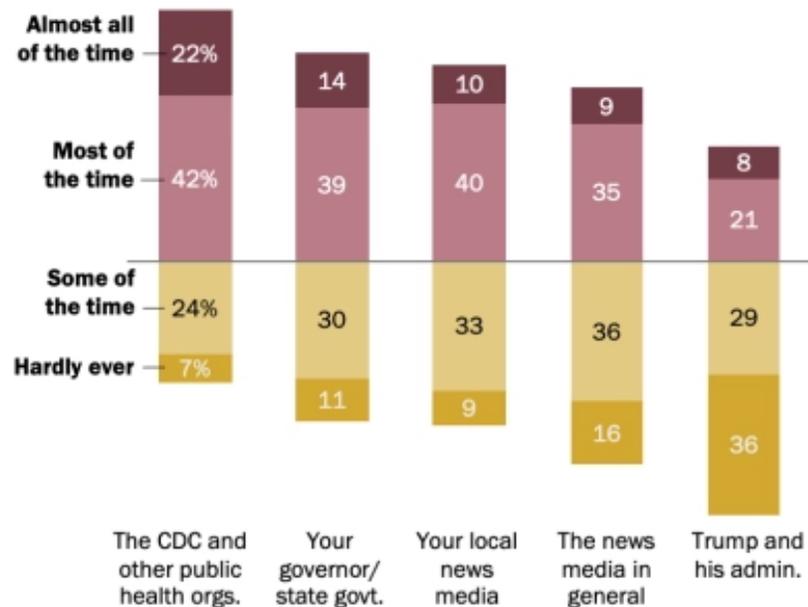
Keen interests of the scientific, public health, and health care communities and the general public

- Trends in and predictions of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths
- Differences in risk by age, race/ethnicity, and comorbidities
- Infectiousness and routes of transmission
- Effectiveness of mitigation strategies
- Prophylaxis and treatment options
- Scope and any long-term effects of infection
- Vaccine timeline and future effectiveness
- Evidence of recovery, cure, possibility of reinfection, and herd immunity

Sources and Perceptions of Facts; Engagement in COVID-19 News

Majority says CDC and public health organizations largely getting the facts right about coronavirus

% of U.S. adults who say each gets the facts right when it comes to the coronavirus outbreak ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer not shown.

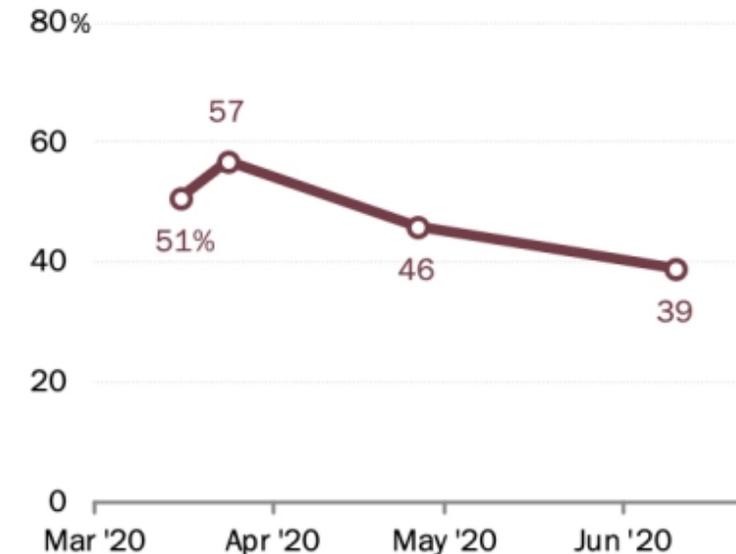
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

"Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fewer Americans now 'very closely' following COVID-19 news

% of U.S. adults who are following news about the coronavirus outbreak *very closely*



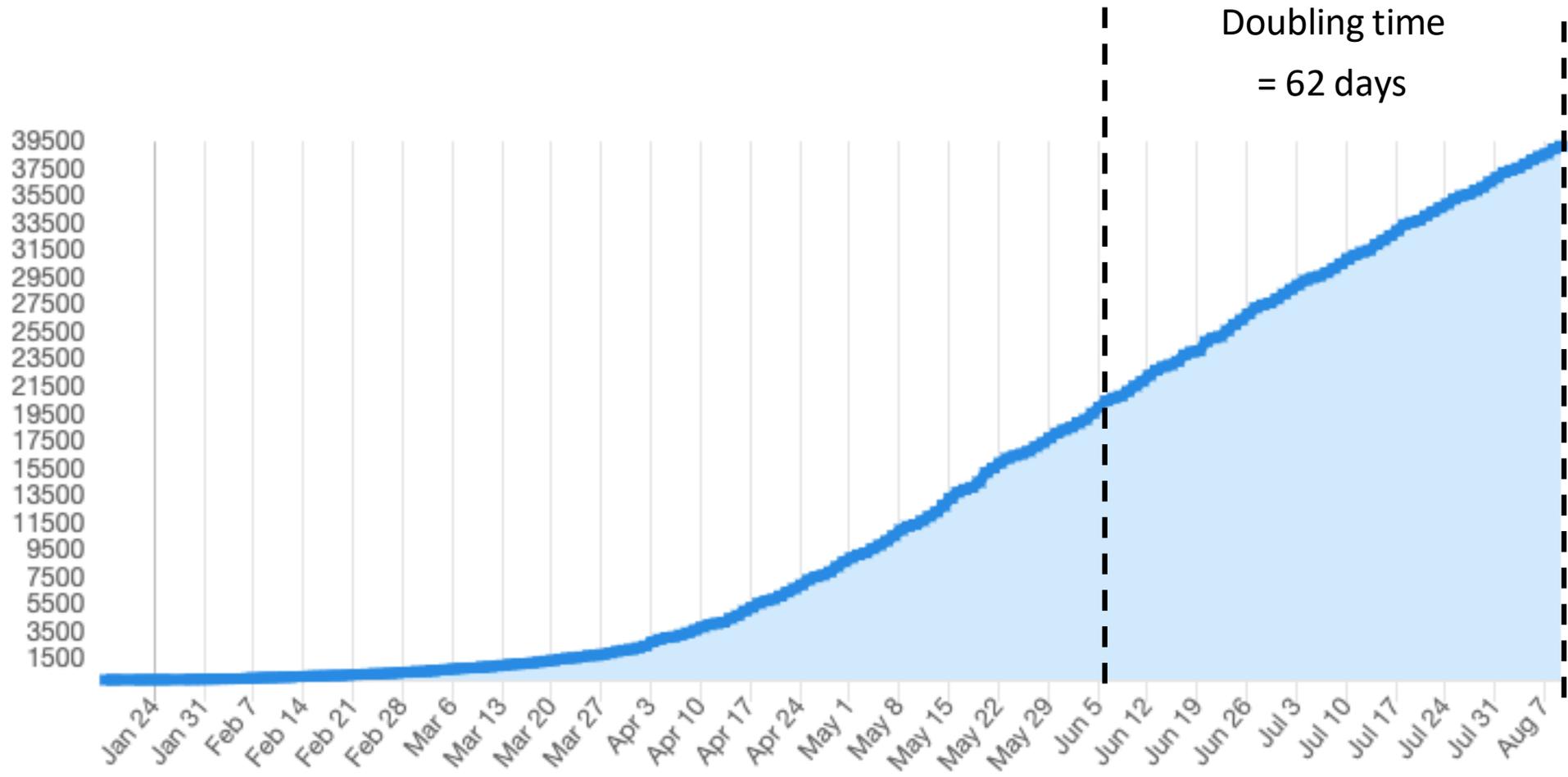
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020. For specific dates of past surveys, see the topline.

"Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News"

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39,172 Publications about COVID-19 in PubMed

(as of August 10, 2020)



Doubling time
= 62 days

Cumulative growth of papers in LitCovid

Who is coming across and susceptible to adopting and spreading misinformation?

- Scientists, public health, health care professionals
- Patients, members of the community, their families
- Decision-makers, local leaders, politicians
- Everyone

Definitions

Misinformation. Incorrect information spread by well-intentioned individuals

Disinformation. Incorrect information spread deliberately to others

Conspiracy. A secret plan made by two or more people to do something that is harmful or illegal

What causes us to adopt misinformation and disinformation?

- Tendency to live in bubbles and echo chambers
- During times of crisis, fear and uncertainty can lead to feelings of losing control
- Denialism feels easier when facing something that is daunting
- We might seek out and adopt ideas that make us feel better
- Confirming our views is easier than searching disconfirming information
- Personal experience influences our worldview
- Humans have a “default” for binary thinking and taking cognitive shortcuts
- Growing culture to dismiss experts
- Doubt creators can be very convincing

Addressing misinformation one conversation at a time

- Whether a person is actually correct in their thinking or not, from their perspective, it's the *other* person who is misinformed, and vice versa.
- Do not ignore misinformation when doing so can result in harm to an individual.
- Address misinformation only when your conversation moves things in a positive direction for the individuals with whom you engage and for yourself.

Addressing misinformation one conversation at a time

- Feel empathy for people who become misinformed.
- Establish trust.
- Listen actively to get to know where people are coming from.
- Maintain a healthy detachment when listening.
- Identify shared interests and values.
- Seek out credible sources of information.
- Avoid thinking that educating someone is the immediate solution.
- Changing someone's mind is not the goal of a conversation.
- Improve communicating of risk and know when to say, "I don't know."

Avoiding Misinformation

- *Recognize uncertainty.* Let new information play out before drawing a conclusion, if at all.
- *Demand objectivity.* Reflect on whether the source has a conflict of interest with the information that is being shared.
- *Take control.* Rather than let sources of news dictate what you see and consume, take a step back, reflect on what you would like to know more about, and research it with credible sources of information and open mind.
- *Outsource.* Let trusted experts whose living is to sift through information do the job for you.

Where to go from here (as individuals)

- Be mindful of the negative aspects of our current infodemic.
- Distinguish disinformation from misinformation. Better to ignore the former and focus your energy on reducing the latter.
- Seek out and encourage others to rely on credible sources of information.
- Address misinformation one conversation at a time, but only when these conversations are mutually beneficial.